

Reflection: Transgender Identity and Inclusion 8.5.18 - Jan Standlea & Dawn Hayami

Scripture

John 13: 34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

DAWN

Good morning, I'm Dawn Hayami and I have the joy of sharing this reflection with Jan Standlea.

First of all, we'd like to thank you for giving us this time to do a reflection on Transgender Identity and Inclusion. I will share some background and personal reflections, we'll watch a short video, and Jan will share information that's important to understand.

Please know that neither Jan nor I are experts on transgender issues. And we cannot possibly cover all the information that's available. We are very grateful for all the helpful suggestions and edits we've received, as we ourselves continue to learn and change.

This is LOUCC's 25th anniversary of being an Open & Affirming (or O&A) congregation, and it's been 10 years since we amended our statement to include gender expression, which is inclusive of transgender people...

‘We are called to love.../ we denounce acts of discrimination.../ We welcome all people....’

Our LOUCC Justice Action Group is acutely aware that these are not just powerful words, these are commitments we've made to educate ourselves, to understand, and to change. It is in this spirit that the Group wished to add to our congregation's understanding through this reflection today, and the reading and discussion of Alex Gino's book, George.

In 2008, when we were getting ready to amend our O&A statement, a group called Trans Active conducted a 3-week workshop for our congregation. I wasn't sure what to expect and wasn't clear what it meant to be a transgender person. I remember hearing the personal stories of the participants and the impact it had on me.

With more openness and information available in the past few years, I am still learning what it means to live as a person whose true gender does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. I've read memoirs by Sarah McBride, Janet Mock, and most recently Alex Gino's book, George. These writers portray a difficult journey from childhood to living into the gender each person knows to be real on the inside. These accounts also reveal that the road is less difficult when one has support - family and friends, mentors and information, insurance coverage and specialized health care. In other words, a supportive community.

When I first heard that a friend's niece wanted to be addressed using the pronoun "they", this sounded ungrammatical, and it felt awkward to adapt to this language. But now that I know I can be supportive and loving by doing something as simple as using the pronouns and name I'm asked to use, I will do it. I will make mistakes, but I'll continue to develop those spiritual muscles and be ready to do what I'm asked by a beloved child of God.

Transgender population estimates vary widely. I read estimates that ranged from 0.1% to 2% of the population. One estimate translated to 1 in about 150-200 people. I've learned gender identity is considered a range rather than the binary male and female, and that the estimated prevalence is higher among generations younger than mine.

The scripture lesson for today is so very clear:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another."

My hope is that as we get to know more transgender people, that we will be open and we will be affirming ... that we'll love one another as Jesus taught in today's scripture.

When a person such as Melissa (the main character of George) trusts you or me and firmly says "this is who I am", we want to be ready to respond to that beloved child of God with unconditional love and respect.

In his own reflection, Dr. Timothy Murphy, executive director of Progressive Christianity Uniting wrote the following:

We can do better; we can see the demand for dignity of transgender persons as part of the movement of the Spirit;
we cannot only stop barring the gates; we can push for changes that move us closer to the Beloved Community. ...
We can listen to our transgender siblings, support non-discrimination against them in the broader society, together working for God's vision for a just society where none shall make them afraid.

JAN INTRO TO VIDEO:

We're going to show you a 7-minute video about a 10-year-old girl named Rebecca who is transgender. The difference with Rebecca's story is that she is growing up with supportive parents and a supportive school. Sadly this is not the case for most kids who identify as trans.

Before we show the video, there are a few terms you may or may not be familiar with: When people identify as **trans or transgender**, this means that the gender a person was assigned at birth does not match the gender that THEY know they are. A person may look to us like a boy on the outside but actually be a girl, or vice versa or not have any particular gender (which is known as **non-binary**). Transgender people have existed in every culture, race, and class since the story of human life has been recorded. Only the term "transgender" and the medical technology available are new.

Transitioning is when a transgender person makes changes to align themselves with their true internal gender. Transitioning is different for each transgender person, and can involve all or none of the following: medical treatment such as surgery or hormones, change of name and pronouns, and change of gender presentation such as clothing, mannerisms, and speech patterns.

So now, let's get to the video:

SHOW VIDEO – “I’m The Scary Transgender Person The Media Warned You About”
<https://www.onenewspage.com/video/20170727/8556935/The-Scary-Transgender-Person-The-Media.htm>

JAN “HOW TO TALK WITH KIDS ABOUT THIS” (handout):

This is such a wonderful video. Those of you who have children in your lives know that they are always about five steps ahead of adults in many areas, and this is one of them. The teens in our class here at LOUCC wanted to focus on social justice issues this year ... and one of the topics they chose to discuss in class was gender identity and gender expression. During class two or three of the middle schoolers said they knew someone or had friends at school who were transgender.

Jane and I helped Pam Rossio at Camp Adams a couple of weeks ago. As I was telling a group of fifteen 4th and 5th graders how to play a game, a 5th grade girl asked me in front of the group if I was married (really on topic, I know). I replied yes. She then said, “Who are you married to?” I said “Jane”, who was standing close by. She screamed and said, “I knew it! I knew it!” She then followed this by saying, “My sister is a lesbian. It’s ok, I get it. I get it.” Now I’m standing there thinking, here’s a 5th grader reassuring me that she gets it, it’s ok she gets it ... when she then adds ... “I’m bi (meaning bisexual)”. Now who knows what bisexual meant to her... maybe that she likes everyone... I don’t know... but our young children are ready to talk about important things.

One of the handouts you have is titled, “Talking To Elementary School Kids About Transgender Identity”. This is an excerpt that is written for the elementary level and I encourage you to read it at home. As a friend of mine said, “As trans people, we’re still in the process of changing the language and the way we perceive ourselves to be more accurate and respectful, and yes things do change quickly!”

For example: One of the statements in the handout that is misleading is to say, “This is how a boy.. or girl.. FEELS.. on the inside ... a more accurate way to say this would be, This .. is .. how.. they.. really.. ARE.. (instead of feels). For example a girl would say, “I’m a girl.” Not ,”I feel like a girl.”

Children ask lots of questions. Hopefully this will help you be prepared to answer some of them. I often find information that is written for younger children explains a topic the best.

Whether or not you have children in your lives now, we recommend you read this handout for your own insight.

JAN “GENDER PRONOUNS” (handout):

Next, we’d like to touch on gender pronouns. :

As Dawn mentioned earlier, it can be confusing. The right words can help open people’s hearts and minds, while others can create distance or confusion. There is a chart in the handouts that shows a few of the more commonly used pronouns, but this is by no means a comprehensive list.

In June Jennie asked me to participate in a national on-line conversation hosted by the UCC called, “Putting the T in LGBTQ Ministries” (LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning). The most important take-away was when one of the moderators said, “When a person asks to be called by a certain name or pronoun, honor their request and call them by that pronoun. When someone says, this.. is.. who.. I am... then that.. is.. who.. they.. are. Don’t question it.”

This reminds me of our conversation here at LOUCC in the 1980s about inclusive language. We learned how important choosing the right words are and how the wrong words can unintentionally hurt others. It is now a common experience for us to sing a hymn or talk about God as Mother, Father, an eagle or the breath.

In Isaiah chapter 45: verses 3-4 it says:

I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who calls you.. by.. your.. name.
For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you.. by.. your ..name,

...Words are powerful!

JAN “KNOW THE DIFFERENCE” (handout)

You have another handout that is titled, “Know The Difference”. We really like this because there are so many terms out there to define that it can get quite confusing. This handout from a national education group called Teaching Tolerance, clearly explains four main concepts: sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. **Sexual orientation**, is in the heart representing our romantic attraction to others; **Gender Identity**, is in the brain where we have a deeply held sense of being male / female or another gender; and **Gender expression**, is the external piece ... the way we dress or act. All of these concepts combine differently in every person, to make us who we are... and we ARE a lovely / diverse make up of God’s creation.

JAN **“HOW CAN I BE SUPPORTIVE OF PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY AS TRANS”** (handout)
CHANGE THE TITLE TO:

HOW CAN I BE SUPPORTIVE OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

The final handout is a good learning opportunity for us. Please get your pencils out. A better title for this handout is “HOW CAN I BE SUPPORTIVE OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE.” I have learned from the book “George” that people who are transgender are best referred to as transgender people, period! (not people who identify as transgender). And so it is.

When you ask what you can do to be supportive...

Hopefully you can go through the journey from “Soooo not my issue...” to one of support and being an ally.

When you become an ally, your actions will help make society a better, safer place for transgender people - and for all who do not conform to conventional gender expectations.

Thank you...